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June 24, 1996

Central Nevada Communication Sites Final Plan Amendment

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United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Nevada State Office
P.O. Box 12000
Reno, Nevada 89520-0006

IN REPLY REFER TO:
1610 (NV-030)

Dear Reader,

This Spring, we invited you and other interested citizens to assist us in finalizing a plan amendment for the management of communication sites in central Nevada. The comments we received from organizations, individuals and the State of Nevada helped us improve the final plan amendment in this document.

The plan amendment is intended to resolve long-standing issues regarding the location of communication sites in central Nevada. It helps maintain public land ecosystems and the quality of life of central Nevada residents and visitors to public lands. It facilitates communication site development by identifying preferred locations and provides flexibility in the location of future communication sites.

The amendment will be implemented on August 9, 1996, pending the outcome of the protest process. You may protest the final amendment to the Director of the Bureau of Land Management if you have participated in the planning process and have an interest that is or may be adversely affected by the plan amendment. Protests must be postmarked on or before August 9, 1996 and include a statement of the issues and parts of the document being protested. Please refer to the Appendix for the mailing address and detailed information on protest procedures. You are welcome to call or visit the Battle Mountain District at 702-635-4000, 50 Bastian Road, Battle Mountain, NV 89820 or the Carson City District at 702-885-6149, 1535 Hot Springs Rd., Carson City, NV 89706 for further information on the implementation of this plan.

My thanks to those of you who gave us your comments and suggestions. I hope that you will continue to help us manage your public lands.

Sincerely,

Ann J. Morgan
State Director, Nevada

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Central Nevada Communication Sites Final Plan Amendment

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this amendment to the Shoshone-Eureka, Lahontan and Walker Resource Management Plans (RMPs) is to identify preferred locations for future communication sites in central Nevada. The amendment identifies areas where sites will and will not be permitted, identifies the types of sites that are appropriate for location on public lands and identifies measures needed to protect public health and safety as related to their use.

The amendment is needed to protect the long term quality of the human environment, including public land ecosystems and the public's health, safety, use and enjoyment of public lands from direct, indirect and cumulative impacts associated with development and operation of communication sites. The amendment is also needed to facilitate site processing by identifying preferred locations. The amendment was initiated at the request of residents of central Nevada and the State of Nevada. State and public concern resulted from changed circumstances involving the expansion of electronic warfare and communication sites for air combat warfare training in central Nevada by the Fallon Naval Air Station. The amendment is intended to address the management of public land ecosystems and their relation to the quality of life in central Nevada. Overall management of Navy training is beyond the scope of the amendment.

Most of this expansion has occurred in the area managed under the Lahontan RMP. An evaluation of the RMP[a] concluded that management direction for military activities was needed. This amendment also includes portions of the Shoshone-Eureka and Walker RMP areas with similar needs.

An evaluation of the cumulative amount of sites found that 69 Navy electronic warfare and communication sites have been constructed on public lands. More than 200 miles of associated powerlines, roads and fiber-optic cable rights-of-way have also been authorized. This is the most extensive and intensive military electronic warfare facility use of civilian public lands anywhere in the nation. Sites of primary concern are threat emitters. These sites simulate enemy surface to air threats. They emit electromagnetic radiation and are directly associated with military combat aircraft training flight locations. Many sites are manned and security patrolled.

The expansion of these sites and associated military air combat training exercises in central Nevada are affecting the quality of the human environment, including the quality of life of BLM's neighbors in central Nevada and the public's use and enjoyment of public lands.

LOCATION

The planning area includes 5.2 million acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the central Nevada counties of Churchill, Lander, Eureka, Nye and Mineral (Map, page 3).

FINAL PLAN AMENDMENT DECISION

A proposed amendment, two action alternatives and a continuation of present management alternatives were analyzed in an environmental assessment. Based on that analysis, subsequent public input, consultation with the Navy and other communication site users, the proposed amendment was selected. Several adjustments to the proposed amendment have been made as a result of additional analysis. These are identified below in italics. Table 1 presents land management categories by acreage for the amendment.

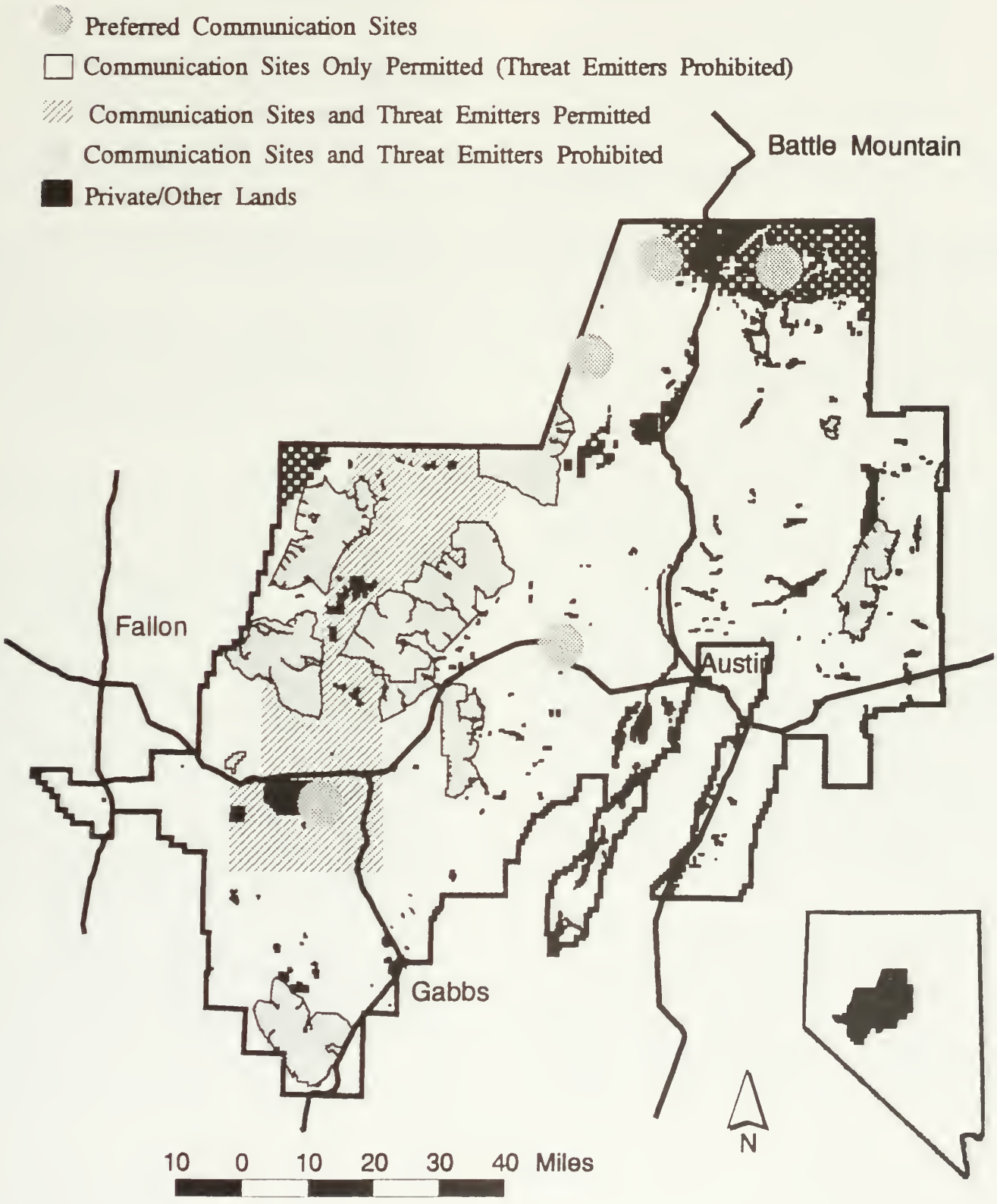
The objective of the amendment is to facilitate future communication site application processing, to fully protect the health, safety and quality of life of central Nevada residents and public land visitors, and to protect public land ecosystems by identifying preferred locations for communication facilities and eliminating inappropriate uses.

The amendment includes the following management prescriptions:

1. Prohibit new threat emitter sites outside of the Dixie Valley area. New threat emitters outside of this area would be incompatible with FLPMA's requirement to manage public land resources in a harmonious and coordinated manner without permanent impairment of the quality of the environment *and productivity of the land.*[b] These sites and their associated military air combat training exercises are incompatible with the health, safety and quality of life of central Nevada residents and the public's use and enjoyment of public lands. These sites are manned by military personnel *including contractors*; require extensive infrastructure developments such as fiber optic cables, powerlines and roads; are dedicated to military use and closed to other users because there is a safety hazard, there is a significant investment in facilities or the military presence will be continuous and long term; and/or there is a direct relationship between the sites and military combat aircraft overflights/*exercises*, such as terrain masking maneuvers. *This prescription applies to any sites which meet the above criteria.*[c]

Central Nevada Communication Site

Final Plan Amendment



2. Facilitate communication site processing and minimize surface disturbance by grouping future communication facilities at locations where existing facilities occur, access is reasonably available, terrain is appropriate for communication facility needs, and other resource values are limited. These preferred locations are Fairview Peak, New Pass, Mt. Moses, the north end of the Fish Creek Mts. and Mt. Lewis (Map). Communication site applicants would be encouraged to locate in these areas. *These areas would be available for all civilian and military non-threat emitter sites*[d].

3. With proper justification, *continue to provide for the location of future civilian and military communication sites (including telemetry sites and excluding threat emitters) on more than four million acres of central Nevada. Proper justification includes physical and economic factors.*[e]

4. Facilitate continued Navy electronic warfare site development by permitting additional communication sites, including threat emitters, in the currently heavily used Dixie/Fairview valleys/Bell Flat/Middlegate area (Map, page 3). *This includes an additional 80,000 acres beyond that identified in the proposed amendment.*[f]

5. Protect important natural, recreation, wilderness, wildlife, watershed, visual and Native American values by prohibiting future communication and electronic warfare sites of all types in the most sensitive areas. These include portions of the Clan Alpine, Desatoya, Stillwater, Gabbs Valley and Simpson Park Mountain ranges, Bald Mountain and the Sand Mountain and Hickison Petroglyph recreation areas (Map, page 3).

6. Ensure that public health and safety on public lands are protected by including the following stipulation on all new and existing communication and electronic warfare sites: "No harmful levels of electromagnetic radiation from communication facilities will be permitted on open public lands."

7. *Other than the electronagnetic radiation stipulation above, existing communication and electronic warfare sites would not be affected by this amendment.*[g]

8. Management decisions apply to all communication and electronic warfare sites and associated facilities, regardless of the type of authorization. This includes rights-of-way, withdrawals and cooperative agreements.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation. Communication and electronic warfare site development under the plan amendment will be periodically monitored and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the decisions. The objective is to determine whether or not implementation of communication site management is achieving the desired results. Information obtained through the evaluation process will be used to adjust management, including any subsequent amendments if

appropriate. *Monitoring and evaluation will be consistent with the schedules identified in the appropriate RMP.*

10. In response to concerns raised as a result of this plan amendment process, the Navy has agreed to drop radar avoidance chaff only over lands under the jurisdiction of the Navy.

11. Current standard operating procedures for environmental analysis will be followed. Each proposal for an individual communication site or threat emitter will be further analyzed in a project-specific environmental analysis.

Table 1
Land Management Prescriptions

Preferred Communication Site Locations (acres (# sites))	Lands Closed to all future Communication Sites and Threat Emitters (acres)	Lands Closed to future Threat Emitters Only (acres)	Lands Potentially Available for all types of Communication Sites and Threat Emitters (acres)
4,000 (5)	640,000	3,950,000	620,000

RATIONALE

Most public comments on the proposed alternative focused on military telemetry and threat emitter sites. Comments ranged from prohibiting all new sites and removing existing sites to full development of electronic warfare throughout the area. The more moderate approach selected for the plan amendment protects the health, safety and quality of life of central Nevada residents, public land visitors, and public land ecosystems while providing for the existing high quality of electronic warfare training facilities and the ability to expand those facilities to improve training.

The primary management prescription is the limitation of new threat emitters to the Dixie Valley region. The primary reason for this limitation is the direct relationship between threat emitters and the intensity of air combat training in their vicinity. As outlined in the environmental assessment, a variety of air combat training missions utilize the threat emitters ranging from low level flights directly over the emitters to low, medium and higher level flights at various speeds in the vicinity of the emitters. Due to the current concentration of threat emitters in Dixie Valley, additional emitters there are not expected to substantially affect associated airspace or public land use.

Currently, air combat training in the affected area is occurring even in areas without threat emitters. While potential future Navy training and its costs could be affected, as analyzed in the environmental assessment, current training would not be affected. In addition, economic benefits from current Navy training activity to the City of Fallon and Churchill County will continue to be realized. Furthermore, the relocation of air-to-air training from Miramar to Fallon would not be affected, since that relocation is not connected to communication

site development.[h] Environmental impacts associated with the amendment are related to avoiding increases in the intensity of air combat training exercises in the vicinity of potential future threat emitters.

The area available for electronic warfare threat emitters has been expanded by more than 80,000 acres compared to the proposed amendment. The amendment has been clarified to explain that new telemetry sites would continue to be permitted on more than four million acres.

Quality of life impacts to central Nevada residents are an important consideration. The environmental assessment concluded that quality of life in central Nevada would decrease if the proposed amendment is not implemented and current management continues. This conclusion was based on accepted methodology.[i] Residents of the affected area expressed strong conclusions about the negative consequences of current and potential future air combat training activities in central Nevada as related to the placement of threat emitters.

The amendment is compatible with the management of adjacent publicly owned lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. On those lands, communication and electronic warfare facilities are limited to six specific locations. The remainder of these lands are closed to communication and electronic warfare facilities. The amendment would provide for more compatible land use decisions across jurisdictional boundaries. Compared to adjacent lands managed by the Forest Service, it would provide greater flexibility to the Navy and others in the location of communication and electronic warfare facilities.

The amendment also includes a management prescription for the prevention of electromagnetic radiation hazards associated with electronic warfare facilities. As noted in the environmental assessment, the Navy identified five existing sites that emitted harmful levels of radiation.[j] Following this public disclosure, the Navy indicated that these hazards have been mitigated. The management prescription does not conflict with existing Navy procedures and would help to ensure that such hazards are minimized in the future.

The preferred communication site locations provide for a rational network of facilities as indicated by State of Nevada and Nevada Bell communications experts. These experts also indicate that the flexibility to locate at other sites with proper justification will enable them to provide for any of their foreseeable communications needs in central Nevada.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

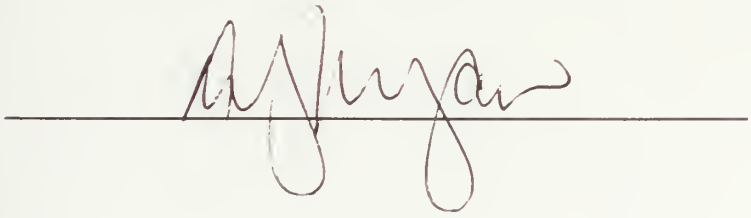
While it would decrease the area available for new military air combat training threat emitters, implementation of the plan amendment would reduce the potential for future adverse environmental impacts. Specifically, identification of preferred areas would result in minimizing the proliferation of sites throughout the area. Prohibiting communication sites in the most sensitive areas would prevent future adverse surface disturbance and associated air combat training impacts. Prohibiting harmful levels of radiation from communication sites would eliminate public health risks associated with the sites. Prohibiting future electronic threat emitter sites outside the Dixie Valley area would reduce adverse air combat training related impacts associated with potential future threat emitters. Consequently, the proposed amendment would have no significant impact.

RATIONALE

The Central Nevada Communication Sites Plan Amendment Environmental Assessment[k] adequately analyzed the environmental impacts of implementing the proposed action and demonstrated the lack of significant impacts. The specificity of the impact analysis was appropriate to the regional plan level of the plan amendment. As stated in the environmental assessment, further site specific NEPA compliance will occur as individual communication site applications are received. Significance is determined by both context and intensity. Impacts of the proposed plan amendment occur over a relatively large area, but are of low intensity because the primary effect of the management prescription are to reduce the potential for future adverse impacts to the human environment.

APPROVED:

Ann J. Morgan
State Director, Nevada



Appendix
Protest Procedures

This resource plan amendment may be protested by any person who participated in the planning process and who has an interest which is or may be adversely affected by the approval of the plan amendment. A protest may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process (see 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-2). Protests must be filed with:

> Director, Bureau of Land Management, Resource Planning Team (WO-480), 1849 C St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20035.

All protests must be in writing and must be postmarked on or before August 9, 1996. Protests should contain the following information:

> The name, mailing address, telephone number and interest of the person filing the protest.
>
> A statement of the issue or issues being protested.
>
> A statement of the part or parts of the document being protested.
>
> A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues previously submitted during the planning process by the protesting party, or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the records.
>
> A short, concise statement explaining precisely why the Bureau of Land Management's Nevada State Director's decision is in error.

End Notes

a. Lahontan RMP Five Year Evaluation. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Nevada State Office, 1992.

b. This provision was added to more closely conform to the language in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

c. This provision was added to ensure that health, safety and quality of life of central Nevada residents and the public's use and enjoyment of public lands would be protected from any future types of facilities that have these characteristics. It would not affect any current or proposed communication sites, and would consequently have no environmental impact.

d. This provision replaces the provision in the proposed amendment which indicated the Fairview site would be available for threat emitters. It was replaced because the Navy has indicated no need for threat emitters at the Fairview site.

e. This provision was added to clarify that the majority of the area would continue to be available for civilian and military non-threat emitter communication sites. BLM will work with applicants on a case-by-case basis to determine where co-location is appropriate and to ensure that the proper justification requirement is not overly burdensome or restrictive.

f. This adjustment was the result of refining the boundaries to more accurately reflect the area of current threat emitter locations and adjusting to conform to the Churchill/Mineral County line.

g. This provision was added to clarify that current communication and air combat training facilities would not be removed or reduced as part of this amendment.

h. U.S. Navy, 1994. Final Environmental Assessment: Relocation of Naval Fighter Weapons School and Construction Battalion Personnel to Naval Air Station Fallon. (Incorporated by reference)

i. Methodology uses public input to the NEPA process from affected individuals (U.S. Air Force, 1981. Preliminary Final Environmental Impact Statement for the MX Missile System).

j. U.S. Navy, Dec., 1995. NWAD RADHAZ Survey Report. Fallon Naval Air Station, Nevada.

k. Incorporated by reference.

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